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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001334

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA ON SYRIA, LEBANON, AND MIDDLE EAST  
PEACE

REF: ANKARA 1213

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman, E.O> 12958,  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Turkish MFA DG Celikkol told us the MFA called in the Syrian Ambassador March 9 and urged Syria to "avoid a crisis" in Lebanon, but stopped short of anything stronger. MFA officials still assert that a reduced Syrian role in Lebanon will threaten "stability." They view Assad as a would-be reformer contending with old-guard Ba'athists. MFA officials claim PM Erdogan has made a decision to visit Israel and the only remaining issue is timing. End Summary.

2. (U) Ankara DCM hosted a March 10 luncheon for Turkish MFA DG for Middle East Affairs Celikkol, and Middle East Department Heads Bozay and Botsali.

MFA Calls in Syrian Ambassador on Troop Withdrawal  
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3. (C) Instead of sending a letter to Assad from PM Erdogan on Syria withdrawing its troops from Lebanon (reftel), Celikkol said the MFA ultimately decided to call in the Syrian Ambassador on March 9. Celikkol said FM Gul and U/S Tuygan urged Syria to "avoid a crisis." The Gul meeting lasted about ten minutes. As Celikkol described it, Gul urged the Syrians to "beware of escalation" but "did not tell them (the Syrians) what to do."

4. (C) After the Gul meeting, Celikkol said, U/S Tuygan met with the Ambassador, urged full compliance with UNSCR 1559, and stressed that Lebanon's upcoming elections should be free of outside influence. The Ambassador reportedly responded the world will be surprised at the speed of Syria's withdrawal but that is "the easy part;" subsequent internal Lebanese politics will be difficult.

Focus on "Stability"  
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5. (C) To this, Celikkol added his own concern about Lebanon's stability and wondered who will disarm Lebanon's militias. DCM responded that Syria's presence is destabilizing and that UNSCR 1559 requires that militias disarm. The international community will have to help Lebanon in this regard, and free Lebanese elections will increase incentives to disarm and pursue change through politics instead of violence. Democratic change is occurring throughout the region and we all need to move forward.

6. (C) Celikkol expressed concern about "extreme Islamic elements" coming to power in elections. DCM asked what the alternative is: change is inevitable, trying to freeze the situation will only stoke extremism.

Turkey's Lebanon and Syria Policies  
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7. (C) DCM asked Celikkol about Turkish media criticism that on Syria and Lebanon, Turkey's policies are "out of step" with the international community. Celikkol admitted that a group of academics went even further with him recently, saying Turkey has "no policy." Still, Celikkol maintained Turkey's Lebanon policy is clear: support for 1559 and insistence on no outside interference with Lebanese politics.

8. (C) On Syria, Celikkol said "our leadership" sees Assad as flexible and susceptible to being influenced to promote change. Asked for an example of such change, Celikkol replied that Syria is now willing to accede to whatever overall settlement terms the Palestinians can agree to with Israel and are ready for peace in exchange for return of Syrian territory. Pressed, he claimed that this is an important change "as we understand it."

9. (C) DCM noted continued Syrian support for violent Palestinian rejectionist groups. Celikkol agreed. He admitted neither Gul nor Tuygan made this point to the Syrian Ambassador on March 9, but claimed Turkey "always" urges "moderation."

10. (C) Celikkol and Middle East Department Head Bozay predicted Assad would make economic reforms now more than ever, given Syria's potential loss of control in Lebanon's

economy. Asked whether economic reform was in the Assad family's interest, Bozay argued the Assad family would be able to make real economic reform while simultaneously keeping special benefits for itself. Celikkol and Bozay claimed Turkey's FTA with Syria was consistent with EU harmonization requirements. When pressed, Celikkol then admitted the EU is not currently pushing Turkey on the FTA. Under further questioning, Celikkol and his colleagues said the FTA has not yet been submitted to the Turkish Parliament and Turkey will follow the EU's lead on economic relations.

11. (C) Celikkol averred that Turkey wants a democratic Syria but that the "old system" could still beat down what he perceived as Assad's desire for reform.  
Turkey/Israel/Palestine

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12. (C) Celikkol said he will visit Israel and the Palestinian territories April 6-7. DCM asked when PM Erdogan will visit Israel. Celikkol replied the PM is committed to visiting Israel and only the timing remains to be worked out. DCM noted the PM had recently found time to visit Ethiopia. PolCouns asked Celikkol whether Erdogan's failure to schedule a visit may be hindering a greater Turkish role in the peace process and whether the MFA has paid attention to subtle but unmistakable Israeli hints in this regard. Celikkol made as if he did not understand the point. In response to the Turks' complaint that Turkey was excluded from the recent London conference on assistance to the Palestinians, DCM suggested that Turkey clarify what type of assistance it is prepared to offer.  
EDELMAN